

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000137

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2013

TAGS: PREL ZI

SUBJECT: ZVOBGO-AMBASSADOR MEETING

REF: HARARE 64

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

11. (C) ZANU-PF elder statesman Eddison Zvobgo told the Ambassador January 15 that he preferred to keep his upcoming trip to the U.S. focused primarily on personal business but, at the Ambassador's suggestion, he agreed to consider stopping in Washington. Zvobgo discussed a faction within the ruling party that wants Mugabe to resign, and named General Solomon Mujuru and former Finance Minister Simba Makoni as two of its most prominent members. He said his group planned to press for an extraordinary party congress to deal with the national crisis and succession issues, and solicited support for the group's efforts. Zimbabwe, Zvobgo believed, cannot survive another two years with Mugabe at the helm without suffering irreparable damage. End Summary.

FOOD

12. (C) On January 15, Amb and Poloff met with Eddison Zvobgo, an elder statesman in the ruling party who has been estranged from President Mugabe since 2000, to discuss the political and economic future of Zimbabwe and ZANU-PF.

13. Zvobgo lamented the deteriorating food situation and commented that he had had to intervene on behalf of some of his constituents/staff to procure corn from the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). Zvobgo told us that he had only received 100 packets of corn meal yesterday, several weeks after he contacted the GMB.

TRIP TO THE US

14. (C) Ambassador noted Zvobgo's planned trip to the U.S. and suggested that Zvobgo stop in Washington. Zvobgo at first did not seem amenable to a Washington stop, stating that he planned to go to Atlanta, Boston, and Chicago to visit old friends but had not planned on pursuing a political agenda. He told us that he prefers to denounce and criticize the government and ZANU-PF from within Zimbabwe thereby exercising his rights of free speech. Furthermore, he said he did not see the point in such meetings in Washington as the situation in Zimbabwe is debilitating. The Ambassador assured him that the meetings would not be public but discreet. In the end, Zvobgo agreed to discuss the utility of such meetings with his wife and would let us know his decision. (NOTE: As reported reftel, Zvobgo previously told poloff January 9 that he was traveling to the United States in part to raise support for a rival faction within ZANU-PF. END NOTE.)

PARTY DISSENSION

15. (C) Zvobgo reiterated his earlier assertion to Poloff that there exists a faction within the party that wants Mugabe to resign. The Ambassador asked who else was involved. Zvobgo named Solomon Mujuru, Simba Makoni, Shadreck Beta from Manicaland, and a "Murerwa from Harare." (Note: The only Murerwa with which we are familiar is Finance Minister Herbert Murerwa, who represents Goromonzi, a constituency which abuts Harare province, in Parliament. End Note). He did assure us that this faction was well represented amongst veteran and younger party members. Zvobgo said that the fight could best be carried from within the party and that his group would press for an extraordinary party congress to deal with the national crisis and succession issues.

16. (C) Zvobgo asked if the US might be willing to support this party within a party.⁸ The Ambassador was noncommittal but told Zvobgo that the US has nothing against ZANU-PF per se but takes issue with the human rights and civil liberties abuses perpetrated by the party leadership and the

government. The Ambassador said the U.S. would be willing to support groups of people who were working for a return to the rule of law and a resumption of respect for human rights and civil liberties. Zvobgo seemed to accept this but wanted assurances that any support would be discreet. The Ambassador reassured him on this count. No specific types of support were requested or discussed.

17. (C) The Ambassador asked Zvobgo his opinion on the recent press story about a possible Mugabe resignation. Zvobgo seemed to believe that the leak must have come from within ZANU-PF, either someone who disliked the person rumored as the heir apparent -- Speaker of Parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa -- or who just wanted to shake things up. He did not place much credence in the story but agreed that Mugabe needs to leave office before his term is up if Zimbabwe is to recover economically. Zvobgo was dismayed at the decline of ZANU-PF's fortunes and blamed Mugabe. The Ambassador mentioned his meeting with General Mujuru on January 9 and Mujuru's proposal that Mugabe step down in two years, after the parliamentary elections. Zvobgo thought two years was too long to wait--the country would be in ruins by that time and the party would be irreparably damaged.

PARLIAMENT

18. (C) Zvobgo told us he plans to propose a long-overdue anti-corruption commission to Parliament after it resumes on February 14. This commission was called for in the 1990's constitutional revision, but never implemented. Zvobgo said he has around seven ZANU-PF MPs who will support him. He said he had not introduced it sooner out of respect for the younger MPs.

Comment

19. (C) Zvobgo has long been dissatisfied with what has happened to his party and he is a good source of information on developments within ZANU-PF (He was a Politburo member for 20 years until being expelled by Mugabe in 2000 -- for honest and public criticism of the Zimbabwean President -- and he remains an MP and member of the somewhat less influential Central Committee). However, he told us several months before the election that he was trying to coordinate public statements from a number of ruling party heavyweights calling on Mugabe not to contest. As we know, no such statements were ever issued, and Zvobgo sought temporary safehaven in South Africa for a couple of months around that time after expressing criticism of Mugabe. Although he has had difficulty in the past convincing others to follow in moves against Mugabe and party leadership, further deterioration here could push some of Zvobgo's more frightened party colleagues finally to take a stand, purely out of self-interest. As we have reported recently, frustration is growing within the Politburo, many members of which believe Mugabe's departure is necessary, but none of whom have a realistic plan or the guts to accomplish this, and none of whom are interested in genuine reconciliation and cooperation with the MDC.

SULLIVAN